

Change to Conservation Measure for the California Black Rail
Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program
Program Decision Document 11-004

Steering Committee Motion

The Steering Committee approves Reclamation's recommended changes to conservation measure BLRA1 to:

BLRA1 – Create 130 acres of California black rail habitat. Of the 512 acres of LCR MSCP-created marsh, 130 acres will be created and managed to provide California black rail habitat near occupied habitat in Reaches 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. This habitat will be provided by designing and managing at least 130 acres of the 512 acres of created Yuma clapper rail habitat to provide habitat for both species. Habitat will be created in patches as large as possible but will not be created in patches smaller than 5 acres. Additional California black rail habitat may be provided by marsh vegetation that becomes established along margins of the 360 acres that will be created in Reaches 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. These small patches of habitat provide cover for dispersing rails, thereby facilitating linkages between existing breeding populations and the colonization of created habitats.

Current Conservation Measure

5.7.13.2 Conservation Measures

BLRA1 – Create 130 acres of California black rail habitat. Of the 512 acres of LCR MSCP-created marsh, 130 acres will be created and managed to provide California black rail habitat near occupied habitat in Reaches 5 and 6 (Figure 5-2). This habitat will be provided by designing and managing at least 130 acres of the 512 acres of created Yuma clapper rail habitat to provide habitat for both species. Habitat will be created in patches as large as possible but will not be created in patches smaller than 5 acres. Additional California black rail habitat may be provided by marsh vegetation that becomes established along margins of the 360 acres that will be created in Reaches 5 and 6. These small patches of habitat provide cover for dispersing rails, thereby facilitating linkages between existing breeding populations and the colonization of created habitats. (HCP, pg 5-57)

Justification

When the LCR MSCP was finalized in 2005 the historic locations for the California black rail were confined to Reaches 5 and 6. Recent monitoring and research data collected by Reclamation and other parties have expanded the known distribution of the California black rail to include Reaches 3 and 4. Expanding the Program's conservation opportunities into Reaches 3 and 4 for the California black rail will benefit the program, the species and encourage migration to the north along the river. The California Endangered Species Act (CESA) 2081 permit issued to LCR MSCP California permittees also lists conservation measures for California black rail

habitat creation within Reaches 3-6 (CESA Incidental Take Permit 2081-2005-008-06). Adopting these changes to conservation measure BLRA 1 would make this requirement consistent between the two permits.

MONITORING RESULTS FOR CALIFORNIA BLACK RAIL

The California black rail was listed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) as a migratory nongame bird of special concern in 1995 (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service 1995). California Department of Fish and Game listed this species as threatened while the Arizona Game and Fish Department has listed it as a species of special concern in Arizona (Arizona Game and Fish Department 2002, California Department of Fish and Game 2006). Since actions covered under the LCR MSCP were expected to affect 103 acres of existing black rail habitat on the lower Colorado River (LCR), two conservation measures were developed and listed in the Habitat Conservation Plan for this species. Conservation Measure BLRA 1, which calls for the creation and management of 130 acres of black rail habitat near occupied habitat within Reaches 5 and 6, was based on the limited data available on black rail distribution prior to 2005.

Prior to the development of a multi-species marsh bird survey protocol in 2006, most detections of California black rail along the LCR occurred during directed surveys that were limited in area and duration or as incidental observations during surveys directed towards monitoring other species, especially Yuma clapper rail surveys conducted since the Yuma Clapper Rail Recovery Plan was written in 1983 (USFWS 1983). With the development of the multi-species marsh bird survey protocol, which utilizes tape recorded calls for several secretive marsh bird species including black rail, at the advent of the LCR MSCP, Reclamation and others have detected black rails outside Reaches 5 and 6 (Table 1). Detections of California black rail have ranged from 2-5 annually since 2007.

Table 1. California black rail detections within LCR MSCP Reaches 1-3 and adjacent areas from 2002 to 2010

<u>AREA</u>	<u>REACH</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>
Topock Gorge ¹	3						2		5	1
Beal Lake ²	3						1			
Topock Marsh ²	3									1
Lake Mead ³	1							2		
Virgin River ⁴	N/A	3	1							
Ash Meadows ⁵	N/A							1		
TOTAL		3	1	0	0	0	3	3	5	2

¹Kahl 2010; Kahl 2007; Bureau of Reclamation unpublished data

²Christopher Nadeau, University of Arizona, personal communication

³Joseph Barnes, National Park Service, personal communication

⁴Rathbun and Braden 2003; Braden et al. 2005

⁵Carl Lundblad, USFWS, personal communication

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